

State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC)

Focusing on Emergency Communications System Interoperability

Challenge

Public safety officers, firefighters and emergency medical service providers are severely hampered in their ability to effectively respond in a coordinated manner to crimes, disasters, fires and medical emergencies because their communications systems are often incompatible.

An article in the April 2000 edition of the *National Institute of Justice Journal* stated: "Public safety agencies report that incompatible radio frequency [equipment] ... and limited funding to update equipment are their biggest problems."

Facts:

- One in three public safety agencies have experienced operational difficulties due to lack of wireless interoperability.
- More jurisdictions have invested in different, incompatible wireless technologies.
- Public safety communication is spread over ten bands of spectrum.
- Washington's diverse geography presents logistical problems.

This results in:

- Increased risk to life and property due to unavailability of safety/medical personnel (unable to receive coordinated emergency instructions; staff occupied with duplicative training)
- Increased costs (emergency vehicles requiring multiple radios; additional training; no leverage for aggregated purchasing discounts)

Call to action

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In the near future, the following actions may be taken:

- Seek partnerships between state and local agencies
- Develop a wireless communications plan for Washington state
- Identify funding resources
- Establish emergency technology standards
- Make coordinated investments in statewide systems

Approach

Interoperability is an essential communication link with public safety and public service communications systems, which permits units from two or more different entities to interact with one another. It also allows the exchange of information according to a prescribed method to achieve predictable results.

The SIEC was created and codified in July 2003 in part to:

- Develop policies for technical standards for state wireless radio communications systems.
- Coordinate and manage the licensing and use of state-designed and state-licensed radio frequencies.
- Serve as point of contact for the state and Federal Communications Commission on matters relating to allocations, use and licensing of radio spectrum.
- Seek support, including possible federal funding or other funding, for state-sponsored wireless communications systems.
- Develop recommendations for legislation that may be required to promote interoperability of state wireless communications systems.
- Foster cooperation and coordination among public safety and emergency response organizations.
- Work with wireless communications groups and associations to ensure interoperability among all public safety emergency response wireless communications systems.

Participants

The SIEC membership includes:

Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs

Washington State Fire Chiefs Association

Washington State Fire Marshal

Washington State Department of Natural Resources

Washington State Patrol

Washington State Department of Transportation

Washington State Military Department

Washington State Emergency Management Division

Washington State Department of Information Services

Washington State Association of Counties

Association of Washington Cities

Washington State Emergency Management Directors